

## Sūrah Nāzi‘āt

### Central Theme

In this *sūrah* also, a severe warning is sounded to the arrogant leaders of the Quraysh who reckoned punishment and the Day of Judgement to be improbable events. They regarded them to be mere threats and nothing to do with reality. The effects produced by winds and clouds are presented in this *sūrah* and the Quraysh are informed that they must not regard themselves to be beyond God’s grasp and should dare not deny the Prophet (sws). They are only secure as long as the Almighty has given them respite. As soon as this period ends, they will be seized by the Almighty without any difficulty. The winds and clouds which are present everywhere and are essential for their subsistence will become instruments of God’s wrath and will uproot and ravage them.

This *sūrah* resembles Sūrah Dhāriyāt and Sūrah Murasalāt as far as its preamble and meaning are concerned. The manifestations of accountability to God in this world and the majesties of His power and providence so evidently present around man bear witness that there will necessarily come a day on which the Almighty will punish the rebellious who disobeyed His directives and will bless with eternal reward the righteous who were fearful of Him and controlled their desires.

### Analysis of the Discourse

**Verses (1-5):** Winds and clouds bear witness that the punishment of which the prophet of God is informing them is bound to come. The God in whose hands are the reins of the winds and clouds can make them into a source of blessing for those whom He desires and a source of suffering for whomsoever He desires. Nothing is beyond Him. The history of nations who have denied their respective messengers in this world bears witness that one day each and every person will be called to account before the Almighty.

**Verses (6-14):** A portrayal of the upheaval which will take place on the Day of Judgement as well as of what will befall its rejecters.

**Verses (15-26):** A reminder of the relevant parts of the tale of Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh for the admonition of the Quraysh. This mention is commensurate with the central theme of the *sūrah*. Moses (sws) very earnestly tried to bring the Pharaoh to the right path; however, he

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resisted because of arrogance, as a result of which he was seized by the Almighty and this was not much of a bother for Him: a slight onslaught by the winds was enough to destroy them.

**Verses (27-33):** An argument is presented that re-creating man is not at all difficult for the Almighty: How can it be difficult for Him Who created the heavens and the earth, brought forth the night and day and arranged for the nourishment of people in such a thorough manner? His power bears witness that He can do so and His wisdom entails that He should do so.

**Verses (34-41):** A mention of the fate of the rebellious and the disobedient on the Day of Judgement. In contrast, glad tidings are given of the reward that those who remained fearful of the Almighty will receive on the day.

**Verses (42-46):** The Prophet (sws) is reassured not to be bothered by those who pester him regarding the time of arrival of the Day of Judgement and other details of this Day and who call for it in haste. The time of arrival of the Day of Judgement is something which only the Almighty knows; the Prophet (sws) should only consign this matter to Him; he has not been sent in this world to disclose its exact date of arrival; his responsibility is only to inform them about it. When people who regard it to be a far-fetched thing see it coming, they will feel that they remained in this world but for a short part of the day.

### Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا (١) وَالتَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا (٢) وَالسَّاجِدَاتِ سَبْحًا (٣) فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا (٤)  
فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا (٥) يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ (٦) تَتَّبِعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ (٧) قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ (٨)  
أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ (٩) يَقُولُونَ أَيْنَا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ (١٠) أَيْنَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخِرَةً (١١) قَالُوا  
تِلْكَ إِذًا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ (١٢) فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ (١٣) فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ (١٤) هَلْ أَتَاكَ  
حَدِيثُ مُوسَى (١٥) إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِي الْمَقَدَسِ طُوى (١٦) اذْهَبْ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى  
(١٧) فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَى أَنْ تَزَكَّى (١٨) وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَى (١٩) فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَى  
(٢٠) فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَى (٢١) ثُمَّ أَذْبَرَ يَسْعَى (٢٢) فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَى (٢٣) فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى  
(٢٤) فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى (٢٥) إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَى (٢٦) أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ  
خَلْقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا (٢٧) رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا (٢٨) وَأَعْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا

(٢٩) وَالْأَرْضُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا (٣٠) أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا (٣١) وَالْجِبَالُ أَرْسَاهَا (٣٢) مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ (٣٣) فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى (٣٤) يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى (٣٥) وَبُرِّزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَنْ يَرَى (٣٦) فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى (٣٧) وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٣٨) فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٣٩) وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَى (٤٠) فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٤١) يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا (٤٢) فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرَاهَا (٤٣) إِلَى رَبِّكَ مُنتَهَاهَا (٤٤) إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ مَنْ يُخَشَاهَا (٤٥) كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبُثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَاهَا (٤٦)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Winds which tear out from the roots bear witness, and winds which blow gently bear witness, and clouds which drift in the air bear witness, then overtake each other, then reveal the command of God [that what you are being promised is certain to happen]. 1-5

Fear the day when a shudder will take place, followed by another quiver; many hearts will be trembling on that day, their eyes downcast. (6-9)

They ask: "Shall we be returned to our original state? What! when we become decayed out bones?" They say: "This return would be of great loss!" (10-12)

It will be just a single shout, then, all of a sudden, they will be standing in a ground. (13-14)

Has the story of Moses reached you? when his Lord called out to him in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā saying: "Go you to the Pharaoh; he has transgressed all bounds. Ask him: 'Do you desire to reform yourself? Shall I show you the way to your Lord that you may become fearful of Him?'" Then he showed him a great sign but he denied it and did not accept it. Then he turned back augmenting his efforts. Then he gathered and proclaimed: "It is me who is your supreme Lord." Then God seized him in the punishment of the Hereafter and of the Herein. Indeed, in this there is a great lesson for those who fear. (15-26)

Is it more difficult to create you or the sky? He made it and raised high its roof; then perfected it, covered its night and uncovered its day, and after that spread out the earth, and He brought forth from it, its water and its fodder, and set firm mountains over it as a means of benefit for you and your cattle. (27-33)

So when that great upheaval takes place [all of this will be destroyed]. On that Day, man will remember whatever he had done, and Hell will be unveiled for those who will have to encounter it. Then he who transgressed all bounds and preferred the life of this world to the

Hereafter, Hell shall be his abode, and he who feared the standing before his Lord and restrained his soul from lowly desires, then surely Paradise shall be his abode. (34-41)

They ask you about the Day of Judgement: “When will it come to port?” What have you to do with this? This matter rests with your Lord. You are but one who informs those people about it who fear it. The day when they will see it, it will be as if not more time has elapsed than one evening or one of its mornings. (42-46)

### Explanation

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا (١) وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا (٢)<sup>1</sup>

There are many opinions regarding the interpretation of النَّازِعَاتِ and النَّاشِطَاتِ. However, the dominant opinion is that they refer to angels who claim the souls of the disbelievers harshly and those of the believers gently. Although this opinion has become very famous yet it has no basis. Narratives which depict this opinion are found in *tafsīr* works and are not sound enough that an authentic opinion can be derived from them. There is nothing in the Qur'ān either that supports this opinion. Claiming the souls of the believers and the disbelievers is a matter which relates to the spiritual realm; it does not relate to the observable realm so that an opinion can be soundly corroborated on its basis. And the fact of the matter is that these oaths are sworn here to bear witness to a premise. Since our exegetes are of the opinion that an oath must be sworn by a sacred or blessed entity, they had to go to unnatural lengths to say that angels are implied by these words. I have indicated at various places of this *tafsīr* that generally the oaths that occur in the Qur'ān are meant to bear witness to a premise. The prominent element in them is to substantiate a claim regardless of whether the sworn entities are sacred or not.

In my opinion, النَّازِعَاتِ refers to forceful winds which uproot trees, houses and things firmly rooted in the earth. The adjectives of ذَارِيَاتِ and مُرْسَلَاتِ and عَاصِفَاتِ are also used for such winds in the Qur'ān and the words دُرُورًا, غَرْقًا, and عَصْفًا respectively are used with them for emphasis. Similarly, here the word نَازِعَاتِ is used for strong winds which uproot trees and houses and the word غَرْقًا emphasizes their severity.

In Sūrah Qamar, the punishment of tempestuous winds which were sent to the people of 'Ād is depicted thus:

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1. Winds which tear out from the roots bear witness, and winds which blow gently bear witness.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمٍ نَحْسٍ مُسْتَمِرٍّ تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ  
مُنْفَعِرٍ (٥٤: ١٩-٢٠)

On a day of unremitting woe, We had let loose on them a howling wind which plucked out the people as if they were uprooted trunks of palm-trees. (54:19-20)

The verb تَنْزِعُ is used in the above quoted verse. The word نَزَاعَاتُ used in this sūrah is also made from this verb.

The word نَاشِطَاتُ is from نَشِطٌ which means to do something gently and also means to loosen the noose of an animal's string so that it can nibble and chew. Here, there is a strong indication that this word has been used to mean gentle and mild winds in much the same way the words فَالْجَارِيَاتِ يُسْرًا occur in Sūrah Dhāriyāt.

It should be kept in consideration that the apparent effects of strong and gentle winds are different; however, the grandeur and majesty of God is evident in both. Sūrah Dhāriyāt has a different context in which the gentleness of the wind is mentioned as a prelude to the mention of rain. Here the wind is mentioned independently because of which it can include both its good and bad effects. Its good effects are obvious because its blowing becomes a source of life, freshness and delight; however, both these type of effects are totally in the hands of the Almighty. If He wants, even gentle winds can become a source of destruction. Consequently, the account of Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh mentioned further ahead in the sūrah attests to this fact. The Almighty saved Moses (sws) and the Israelites through the impact of the strong easterly wind and it was the gentleness of this wind which destroyed the Pharaoh and his armies.

وَالسَّابِحَاتِ سَبْحًا (٣) فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا (٤) فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا (٥)<sup>2</sup>

The word سَابِحَاتِ is from سَبَحٌ which also means "to float". Contextual indications point to the fact that it is used as an attribute of the clouds. In the first place, the relationship between winds and clouds is inseparable; however, a very clear indication is that the two attributes mentioned subsequently begin with the particle ف which, on the basis of linguistic principles of Arabic, shows that these attributes are those of سَابِحَاتِ and there is a sequence also between these attributes. I have already alluded to this principle in the previous sūrahs.

2. And clouds which drift in the air bear witness, then overtake each other, then reveal the command of God [that what you are being promised with is certain to happen].

A little deliberation shows that what is mentioned in the verses by the words *فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبَقًا* *فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا* is very much the same as the one mentioned in Sūrah Dhāriyāt and Sūrah Mursalāt in the very similar verses: *فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرَقًا* *فَالْمُلْقِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا* and *فَالْمُقَسَّمَاتِ أَمْرًا* respectively. It has already been explained in these *sūrahs* that these attributes refer to cloud-laden winds which blow over areas they are divinely directed to and then they distribute the orders of the Almighty which means that they faithfully carry out these orders there: at some places, they send down rain as a blessing and at some other places, they cause disaster and destruction. At some places, they cause abundant rain and leave other places dry and thirsty. In other words, what is said in Sūrah Dhāriyāt by the words *فَالْمُقَسَّمَاتِ أَمْرًا* is said here by the words: *فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا*.

Prior to this, the words *فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبَقًا* portray the racing of clouds which becomes evident in the skies when various groups of clouds appear and try to outrun one another. It looks as if they are competing with each other at divine bidding and each one of them is desirous of fulfilling its duty first.

The complement of oath (*muqsam 'alayh*) of all these oaths is suppressed. Many examples of such suppression have occurred in preceding *sūrahs* like Sūrah Ṣu'ād, Sūrah Qāf and Sūrah Qiyāmah. When there is no need of mention, suppression is always more eloquent. Here since the cataclysm of the Day of Judgement is mentioned in detail in the succeeding *sūrah* which suffices to point to the complement of oath, no real need remains to mention it. If one wants to reveal it, one can do so in the light of Sūrah Mursalāt as (٧ : ٧٧) *إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ* (what you are being promised with is certain to come). In other words, by presenting the various effects of strong and gentle winds and clouds as evidence, the arrogant leaders of Quraysh are warned that the punishment they are being threatened with should not be regarded as impossible by them. Whenever the Almighty wants to bring it forth, He will not have to make elaborate arrangements for it; the history of the multifarious effects of the winds and clouds which exists and which has been recounted before them is enough for them to learn a lesson. Many nations much stronger than them which inhabited this earth were totally routed and decimated by the Almighty through the winds.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ (٦) تَتْبُعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ (٧)<sup>3</sup>

This is not the complement of oath as is the opinion of some; it is in fact a reminder of the day when they will face punishment they are being threatened with. The Messengers of God warn their people of two

3. Fear the day when a shudder will take place, followed by another quiver.

punishments: one which they will encounter on the Day of Judgement and the other they will face in this world if they reject their respective Messengers.

First, verses 6-14 depict the punishment of the Day of Judgement and then in the succeeding verses 16-17 historical evidence is cited which materializes in this world as a result of rejection of Messengers of God. The punishment of the Day of Judgement is mentioned first because it is this punishment which everyone should remain aware of. It is eternal and everlasting. In its presence, no one should feel secure even if no punishment in this world is to come. That the punishment of the Day of Judgement is supplemented by a worldly punishment because of denying the Messengers of God is merely a further arrangement made by the Almighty.

An ellipsis of a verb to the effect: “remember that day” has occurred before the word **يَوْمٍ**.

The word **رَاجِفَةٌ** means a shudder and an earthquake and **رَادِفَةٌ** refers to the second jolt after the first. The upheaval that will take place on the Day of Judgement will stand complete through two trumpet sounds. Here the two effects of both these sounds are referred to. The objective is to make it clear to those who deny the Day of Judgement that they should not regard it to be an impossibility or a far-fetched probability. It will take just two jolts to wrap up this whole world.

**فُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ (٨) أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ (٩)**<sup>4</sup>

In the previous verses, effects of the upheaval of the Day of Judgement which will appear in this universe are portrayed. In these verses, the effects of this upheaval on a man's heart and soul are portrayed. Many a heart on that day will be beating and the eyes will be downcast because of fear. This is the state of people who were fearless of this Day and when they were warned of it they would stubbornly make fun of it. On the other hand, the Qur'an has clarified elsewhere that people who feared the punishment of that day without witnessing it will be safe and secure from the pangs of that day.

The antecedent of the pronoun in **فُلُوبٌ** is **أَبْصَارُهَا** (hearts). A person's heart is the real personality of a person and each and every part of the body actually reflects what goes on in the hearts. In particular, eyes reflect the most concealed thoughts of the heart. It is because of this relationship of the heart with the eyes that the latter are linked to the former in this expression.

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4. Many hearts will be trembling on that day, their eyes downcast.

يَقُولُونَ أَإِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ (١٠) أَيْدًا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخْرَةً (١١) قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذًا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ (١٢)<sup>5</sup>

This is a depiction of the fun these people would make when they would hear about being recreated one day.

The original meaning of the word حَافِرَةٌ is “footstep”; however, when used idiomatically as in فَلَانَ رَجَعَ عَلَى حَافِرِهِ أَوْ فِي حَافِرِهِ it means that such and such a person reverted to his original state. The implication is that when they are warned that they will be re-created after death so that they can be made accountable for their deeds, they would make fun of it and mockingly ask one another: “Hey! Will we be created again after we have become decayed bones?”

Here a repetition of an interrogative sentence is meant to express further amazement on their part: in the first place being re-created after death is strange and even stranger is the fact that this life will be given when the bones of the body have decomposed and become part of the earth. The implication is that no one can accept such a far-fetched and beyond-intellect thing.

The words إِذَا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ express the fact that after making fun these people remark in a serious tone: “if what these religious clerics say comes true, then such a return would entail great loss and failure for us.”

Although they would utter these words in a serious mood also to make fun, these words reflect their inner-selves: Their hearts were not satisfied on denying the Day of Judgement. They thought that the arguments proffered in its substantiation carried weight and even feared the consequences of its denial but were not willing to give up the pleasures of life to accept this reality. For this reason, they would try to defer this threat by making fun of it and would reckon that if ever the Day of Judgement came, it would be of grave danger for them but they would tackle it when it would come; why should they make their life miserable now by worrying about it? It may be kept in consideration that this is the philosophy of all those who are careless in life whereas if the Hereafter is even given a slight thought, then it is but prudent to spend one's life in consideration of it.

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ (١٣) فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ (١٤)<sup>6</sup>

The implication is that one should let them make whatever useless

5. They ask: “Shall we be returned to our original state? What! when we become decayed out bones?” They say: “This return would be of great loss!”

6. It will be just a single shout, then, all of a sudden, they will be standing in a ground.



comments they want to and let them express the impossibilities regarding the advent of this day to the extent they want to; but they should remember that when the Almighty wants to re-create them He will not need to make any elaborate effort for it nor will there be even a momentary delay in the process. Just a single shout would be enough to make them stand from their graves and gather in the presence of the Almighty.

The word سَاهِرَةٌ means “a level and wide expanse of ground”. Here it refers to the field of *hashr*. The single shout refers to the second sound of the trumpet. This has been explained in Sūrah Zumar in the following manner: (ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ (٣٩:٦٨)) (then the trumpet will be blown again and they shall suddenly rise and gaze around them, (39:68)).

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰ (١٥) إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِي الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى (١٦)<sup>7</sup>

The previous paragraph portrays the punishment of the Day of Judgement. These verses depict historical evidence to substantiate it. As per this evidence, those who denied their respective messengers were punished in this very world. The account of the Prophet Moses (sws) is selected in this regard because it is the most famous evidence that can be presented.

The style هَلْ أَتَاكَ is meant to direct one's attention to the lessons that can be drawn from this account. It is not necessary that the singular pronoun present in these words address the Prophet (sws). I have indicated at various places in this *tafsīr* that this address can be general as well. Consequently, the words stated at the end of this account are إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّمَنْ يَخْشَىٰ (٧٩:٢٦) (Indeed in this account there is a great lesson for those who fear the grasp of the Almighty, (79:26)).

This verse refers to that part of the account of Moses (sws) when he was returning from Midian and had reached the foot of mount *Tūr* and in order to fetch some fire after he had seen it glow from a distance or in order to find his way went to the valley of *Ṭuwā* in the dark of night; there he heard a voice saying: “Moses! I am your Lord. I have selected you for a great task: You will go to the Pharaoh as my Messenger and convey My message to him.”

This account is mentioned here in twelve small verses; however, it is the inimitable brevity of the Qur'ān that all phases from the calling of Moses (sws) to prophethood to the drowning of the Pharaoh – all are covered in such a manner that no aspect which is essential for seeking a lesson by the addressees is left out.

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7. Has the story of Moses reached you? when his Lord called out to him in the sacred valley of *Ṭuwā*

أَذْهَبَ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى (١٧) فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَى أَنْ تَزَكَّى (١٨) وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَى (١٩)<sup>8</sup>

This is the message with which the Almighty sent Moses (sws) to the Pharaoh. The word طَغَى refers to the fact that Pharaoh claimed himself to be the great God and to the coercive attitude of the Israelites. The greatest rebellion in the kingdom of God is to claim being the God Almighty. In order to check his rebellion, the Almighty sent Moses (sws) with His special authority: he was to first gently ask him to mend his ways and if he accepted, then that was good; otherwise he should tell him what fate awaited him.

The words فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَى أَنْ تَزَكَّى imply that Moses (sws) was to ask Pharaoh whether he had an inclination to lead a pious life so that Moses (sws) might guide him to it. A little deliberation on this sentence will show that it simultaneously has great affection and also great majesty which should be the hallmark of an envoy of God. The implication is that till then his attitude showed that there was little hope of any good from him; however, the Almighty was very gracious; even then if the Pharaoh showed inclination to mend his ways, he would be guided to the right path.

The word تَزَكَّى is used in its wider sense. It refers to a life which is without egotism, selfishness and oppression, a hallmark of people who are fearful of the Almighty.

It should be kept in consideration that the real objective of the prophets of God has always been to purify the inner-selves of people. They have achieved this objective through the Books of God. About the Prophet (sws), the Qur'ān says: هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ (It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from amongst themselves who recites out to them His verses and purifies them and [for this] he instructs them in *sharī'ah* and in *hikmah*, (62:2)). It was this very objective which Moses (sws) expressed before the Pharaoh: he told him that if he was willing to come out of his self-styled Godhead and was inclined to reform himself, then Moses (sws) would guide him towards God Almighty.

The words وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَى refer to the fact that though at that time, the Pharaoh was smitten and obsessed with the notion of being God as a result of which he had gone out of control; however, if he had the inclination to hear and understand the truth, Moses (sws) would tell him

8. "Go you to the Pharaoh; he has transgressed all bounds. Ask him: 'Do you desire to reform yourself? Shall I show you the way to your Lord that you may become fearful of Him?'"

who actually was Pharaoh's God and the God of the whole world, whom everyone should fear.

It should be kept in mind that a virtuous life emanates from the fear of God and this fear itself has its roots in the true comprehension of God. In these two sentences, Moses (sws) reminded the Pharaoh of this reality.

فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَى (٢٠)<sup>9</sup>

Moses (sws) had spoken these words in the capacity of a Messenger of God and had also informed the Pharaoh that he had with him the proof of being a Messenger of God. The Pharaoh responded by expressing the fact that he did not know of any god except himself and that if Moses (sws) had any such proof he should bring it forth. At this, Moses (sws) showed him a great sign which of course was that of his staff turning into a snake. It has been called "a great sign" because except for the miracle of the white hand all other miracles were concealed in it and manifested themselves through it.

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَى (٢١)<sup>10</sup>

However, even after seeing this miracle, the Pharaoh did not accept Moses (sws) as a Messenger of God and dubbed him as a magician and a liar and denied him. The words وَعَصَى refer to the fact that the Pharaoh rejected his message which is referred to above in verses 11-12.

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ يَسْعَى (٢٢)<sup>11</sup>

When the Pharaoh turned away after listening to the message of Moses (sws), he schemed to defeat him. At other places in the Qur'ān, one can find the details of this scheme. He called up his magicians in order to make them compete with Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) and defeat them; when he consulted his court confidants, they opined that both Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) were expert magicians and if ordinary magicians were made to contest with them, the chances of defeat and disgrace were quite high. They further opined that it would be better if expert magicians were called up from all parts of the empire and the contest should be held between the two in an open ground. The Pharaoh accepted this suggestion and a contest was held and the result was a humiliating defeat for him.

9. Then he showed him a great sign.

10. But he denied it and did not accept it.

11. Then he turned back augmenting his efforts.

فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَى (٢٣) فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى (٢٤)<sup>12</sup>

This is a reference to the final measure adopted by the Pharaoh when he saw the rising influence of Moses (sws). It is evident from Sūrah Zukhruf that whenever a natural calamity came upon Egypt, he would request Moses (sws) to pray to his Lord to protect them from it and that if as a result of his prayer the Lord in fact warded off this calamity, he would accept Moses' (sws) demand. However, when the calamity would be warded off, he would not fulfil his promise. His repeated breaches were instrumental in increasing the influence of Moses (sws) on the Copts. Overcome with worry, the Pharaoh gathered all the influential people of his nation and tried to revive his influence over them. The speech he delivered at this instance is briefly referred to here. Details are found in Sūrah Zukhruf thus:

وَنَادَى فِرْعَوْنُ فِي قَوْمِهِ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِي  
أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ فَلَوْلَا أُلْقِيَ عَلَيْهِ  
أَسُورَةٌ مِّنْ ذَهَبٍ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ فَاسْتَخَفَّ قَوْمَهُ فَاطَاعُوهُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا  
قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ فَلَمَّا آسَفُونَا انتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (٤٣: ٥١-٥٥)

And the Pharaoh proclaimed among his people. "My people! do not the sovereignty of Egypt and these rivers which flow beneath my feet belong to me? Can you not see? So is this despicable wretch better or I; he can scarcely make his meaning plain? [If he is a Messenger of God] then why have not bracelets of gold been sent down to him or angels sent to accompany him?" He was able to befool his people through this speech and they were in fact a people disobedient. And when they angered Us, We took revenge from them and drowned them all. (43:51-55)

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى (٢٥)<sup>13</sup>

The word نَكَال means an exemplary punishment. When the Pharaoh insisted on his rebellious attitude in spite of witnessing and listening to everything, the Almighty seized him in the punishment of this world and that of the next. In this world, he was consigned to the waves of the sea and in the world to come he would be cast into the torment of Hell.

12. Then he gathered and proclaimed: "It is me who is your supreme Lord."

13. Then God seized him in the punishment of the Hereafter and of the Herein.

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَى (٢٦)<sup>14</sup>

Stated in this verse is the objective for which the tale of Moses (sws) was recounted. Although what is said is said in general terms, yet it is primarily addressed to the Quraysh. The implication is that if the Quraysh have some fear of God, they should learn a lesson from this tale. Wise are those who learn from the fate of others and not those who wait for a calamity to waylay them.

أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا (٢٧)<sup>15</sup>

In the next seven verses, the Almighty has directed attention to His signs which reflect His power and providence. These signs are spread in every nook and corner of the heavens and the earth. They bear witness that the Creator of this world has such great power that accomplishing the mightiest of tasks is not at all difficult for Him. When He can create something as complex as the sky, how can it be difficult for Him to re-create mankind once it is totally obliterated? Similarly, the tremendous system of providence that pervades this world from the earth to the heavens bears witness that He will not leave people unaccountable; He will in fact necessarily gather them and see who fulfilled his obligations to the favours He blessed them with and who showed ingratitude in this regard; finally, He will reward or punish them according to their deeds. In other words, in this verse not only an answer has been given to the objection raised by the rejecters of the Day of Judgement as cited in verses 11-12, the need and wisdom behind the advent of such a Day has also been explained.

رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا (٢٨) وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا (٢٩)<sup>16</sup>

Some great aspects of God's power and wisdom found in the sky are referred to here. The purpose is to induce people who think that re-creation is an impossibility to reflect how this can be so when they are witnessing the majesty and grandeur of His power around them.

The word سَمَكُ means "roof". After creating the sky and raising high its roof, the Almighty levelled it in such a perfect manner that no one can point out a single cleft in it at any nook or corner.

14. Indeed, in this there is a great lesson for those who fear.

15. Is it more difficult to create you or the heaven? He made it.

16. He raised high its roof; then perfected it, covered its night and uncovered its day.

The implication of the verse وَأَعْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا is that initially there was night all over within the sky. It was in the form of smoke as is alluded to in Sūrah Ḥamīm al-Sajdah. Then later the Almighty covered its night and unveiled the light of one part and made the night and the day subservient to a system. The implication of the verse is that can it be difficult to re-create mankind once it is no more for the God Who has the power to spread the blanket of night on this world. Was creating the first time more difficult for Him or the second time?

وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا (٣٠) أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا (٣١) وَالْجِبَالَ أَرْسَاهَا (٣٢)  
مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ (٣٣)<sup>17</sup>

After the signs present in the sky, attention is directed to the signs found on the earth and the purpose here also, as I have pointed out above, is to indicate the power and providence of the Almighty: How can it be difficult to re-create mankind for the God Who spread out the earth and brought forth from it, its water and fodder, and set firm mountains over it to maintain its balance? When He accomplished all these tasks without any difficulty, how can it be difficult to re-create what He had created once?

The words مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ point to the providence which is evident in every single part of this earth. The Almighty did not merely provide for the needs of man, He has also catered for the needs of the cattle which were created for his service. Man should now reflect on the purpose for which the Almighty has made such a tremendous system of nourishment and development for him. Has he been created merely so that he can eat and drink in this world for some period and then meet his end? Should God have no concern with how people led their lives; some of them were pious and other impious; some discharged their obligations towards His favours and others remained totally indifferent.

A little reflection will show that this supposition is absolutely baseless. If this is accepted, it would mean that this world is a place of merry-making. It would also entail that the creator of this world, God forbid, is not wise; he is a merry-maker who thinks that good and evil do not need to be distinguished. Can one even for a moment ascribe such falsities to the great creator of this universe?

A question arises from the words وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا (and after that spread out the earth): Was the sky created after the earth? The reason for

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17. And after that He spread out the earth, and He brought forth from it, its water and its fodder, and set firm mountains over it as a means of benefit for you and your cattle.

this is that in Sūrah Ḥamīm al-Sajdah after the creation of the earth and of certain signs that belong to it are mentioned, it is said: ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ (then, turning to the sky, which was but a cloud of vapour, (41:11)). This evidently means that the sky was created after the earth. I have already answered this question in the *tafsīr* of the afore-mentioned *sūrah*. Readers are advised to look it up. Here, it would suffice to keep in mind the fact that the picture portrayed by the Qur'ān about the creation of the sky and the earth is like that of a building. The sky is the roof of this building and the earth is its floor. When the map of a building is drawn both the floor and the roof are considered simultaneously and the structural plan of both is prepared at the same time. However, during the various phases of construction, at times work is done on the floor and its related structures and at times work is done on the roof and its related structures. From the verses of Sūrah Ḥamīm al-Sajdah at first one gathers that the earth was created first; however, at the same time it is stated that when the Almighty wanted to create the sky it was in the form of vapour in technical parlance “a nebula”. Similarly, here in the verse under discussion although at first it seems that the sky was created first, it can be assumed that this refers to a particular phase of creation after which the creation of the earth was given final touches in the final phase of its creation. Our limited intellect cannot grasp the matter of creation of this unfathomable universe. Only the Almighty has complete knowledge of all its phases of its creation.

<sup>18</sup> فَإِذَا جَاءَتْ الظَّامَةُ الْكُبْرَى (٣٤)

The expression *الظَّامَةُ الْكُبْرَى* means “a great upheaval and an extreme disorder”, and of course refers to the Day of Judgement. The answer to this conditional sentence is suppressed as it is understood. Many examples of such suppressions can be seen in the previous *sūrahs* and I have pointed out the eloquence in them. The implication is that when that great upheaval will take place the earth and sky and what is between them will be destroyed.

<sup>19</sup> يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى (٣٥)

The word *يَوْمَ* is the adverb of place (*zarf*) of the suppressed answer-sentence referred to in the previous verse. In verse 6, this same word is the adverb of place of the suppressed complement of oath (*muqsam*)

18. So when that great upheaval takes place [all of this will be destroyed].

19. On that Day, man will remember whatever he had done.

'alayh). I have translated this verse accordingly.

The implication is that today man inebriated in indifference is unaware of what he is doing; when he is warned of that day, he makes fun of it; however, when that day arrives, he will come to his senses and see what he has earned in the Hereafter.

20 وَبُرِّزَتْ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَنْ يَرَى (٣٦)

Today man regards the Day of Judgement and Hell to be far-fetched; however, on that day Hell will be unveiled to people who will be cast into it. The implication is that Hell will be absolutely ready for them; only the veil will need to be lifted. As soon as this happens, it will be before the very eyes of all those people who were not willing to believe in it unless they saw it.

The words لِمَنْ يَرَى refer to people for whom facing Hell has been ordained because of their deeds. As for the servants of God who feared Hell without seeing it, they will be kept away from it by God and they will not even hear its sound.

21 فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى (٣٧) وَأَثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٣٨) فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٣٩)

Hell shall be the permanent abode of such criminals. In verse seventeen earlier, the rebelliousness of the Pharaoh has already been mentioned. Here it is stated that only those people become rebellious who ignore the Hereafter and become slaves of this world; they are not willing to think and accept anything else.

The words هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (this Hell shall be his abode) emphasize the fact that they will abide in Hell forever; they will have no other place to go.

22 وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَى (٤٠) فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٤١)

On the other hand, those who feared facing the Almighty and instead of running after this world curbed their tendencies to succumb to base desires, Paradise shall be their resting place and they shall never be taken out from it.

The expression مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ means to fear standing before the Lord.

20. And Hell will be unveiled for those who will have to encounter it.

21. Then he who transgressed all bounds and preferred the life of this world to the Hereafter, Hell shall be his abode.

22. And he who feared the standing before his Lord and restrained his soul from lowly desires, then surely Paradise shall be his abode.



In Sūrah Muṭaffifīn, this has been explained thus:

أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٨٣: ٤-٦)

Do these people not think that they will be raised up one day? For presence on a great day. The day when men will rise to stand up before the Lord of the worlds. (83:3-4)

It is the fear of this encounter with the Almighty which stops a person from following his base desires. In the absence of such a fear, nothing can stop a person from running after his desires.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا (٤٢)

It is in this verse and in the concluding verses of the *sūrah* that the Prophet (sws) has been sounded assurance. He has been told not to bother about such people who, in order to tease and ridicule him, ask him about the time of the Day of Judgement: the only responsibility of the Prophet (sws) was to inform people that such a day will come so that those who wanted to be on guard were afforded an opportunity; as for people who wanted to believe in it only after witnessing it and wished to find out its time of arrival, the Prophet (sws) was not responsible for satisfying their demands; those people asked such a question merely to invent an excuse to deny it.

The expression أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا refers to the fact that they ask about its arrival. The particle أَيَّانَ is meant to inquire about some future event; hence it would be erroneous to translate it as “where”; its correct translation is “when”.

The word مُرْسَى means to come to port and set anchor. Concealed in this word is a kind of sarcasm: these disbelievers ask: “for long have we been hearing news that the Day of Judgement is about to come; it has neither come as yet nor will it ever come; when will this ship set anchor on our shores; while waiting for it our eyes have tired out.”

فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرَاهَا (٤٣) إِلَى رَبِّكَ مُنْتَهَاهَا (٤٤)

The Prophet (sws) is assured that he has not been sent to inform them of its time of arrival; no one except the Almighty has knowledge of this; so they should not concern themselves with a question which in the very first place does not relate to them; why should they interrogate the Prophet

23. They ask you about the Day of Judgement: “When will it come to port?”

24. What have you to do with this? This matter rests with your Lord.

(sws) in this regard? they should consign this matter to the Almighty only Who knows its time of arrival.

إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ مَّنْ يَخْشَاهَا (٤٥)<sup>25</sup>

The Prophet (sws) is further assured that he is not responsible for people who want to believe in the Day of Judgement only after seeing it; he should leave them to themselves; his warnings will only affect those who believe in and fear this Day in the light of arguments even though they have not seen it.

كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَاهَا (٤٦)<sup>26</sup>

The implication of this verse is that these people should not be deluded by the fact that if the Day of Judgement is not being shown to them today or a time is not fixed, they need not worry about its advent since it is far-off. When they see it, they will realize that they did not remain in this world for more than the first or last part of a day.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. **وَاللَّهِ** الحمد أولاً و آخراً (gratitude be to God only from the beginning to the end)

Lahore,

27<sup>th</sup> April, 1979 AD

29<sup>th</sup> Jumadī al-Awwal, 1399 AH

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25. You are but one who informs those people about it who fear it.

26. The day when they will see it, it will be as if not more time has elapsed than one evening or one of its mornings.

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